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Human Services Committee
In support of H.B. 6218 An Act Establishing a Task Force on Safety Net Services

February 10, 2011

Good morning Senator Tercyak, Senator Musto, and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Kathryn Libal, and I am an Assistant Professor at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am here to support H.B. 6218 – An Act Establishing a Task Force on Safety Net Services and amended language to the act that allows for members of the public to be included in the Task Force.

This Task Force on Safety Net Services will play a vital role in reevaluating the efficacy of a variety of safety net policies and services, especially those administered under Connecticut's Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) and Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) programs. These programs provide critical supports for our State's most vulnerable families and children.

Research conducted by UConn faculty and graduate social work students and faculty has made clear that a Task Force is needed to help shape priorities within the varied safety net programs, including TFA and Jobs First. We are concerned that over the past 10 years, budgetary priorities for federal funding for TFA and Jobs First have shifted from the programs most vital to securing the basic needs of low income family members to other services. Many of these other programs, while important, do not directly address the considerable needs of families falling below the poverty line in Connecticut.

Funds from the federal government under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program are available to the State under fixed block grants. Given that these resources are not adjusted for inflation, the actual value of TANF funds received by the State has fallen by almost 30% since the mid-1990s.¹ In short, the funds do not go nearly as far as they did a decade or fifteen years ago. Compounding this loss of "real revenue" to support a variety of services for low income families are the decisions made at the state level about *how* to spend TANF funds. In the past decade, these decisions have had deeply negative consequences for safety net supports in Connecticut.

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One example of note is that between 1999 and 2009 programs to prevent pregnancy (which are implemented throughout the state regardless of income status) have commanded an ever larger share of limited TANF monies. In 1997 no federally provided TANF funds supported pregnancy prevention programs in Connecticut; since 2001 that figure has grown to \$70.3 million.² The decision to fund such programs has meant that funds from other programs were diverted to meet these new priorities. Thus funds allocated for crucial programs such as cash assistance and child care supports have been cut drastically. Allocation for cash assistance in 1997 was \$ 320.6 million, compared to \$89.2 million in 2009, representing a 72% cut in funding levels. Child care supports in 1997 accounted for \$75.5 million; by 2009 only \$27.2 million was budgeted for this important support for low-income working mothers (a 64% cut in funding). Even for such central programs like employment services where increases have occurred, funding levels are still inadequate. Examining the impacts of these budgetary shifts and programmatic priorities, as well as their implementation, is all the more necessary in the current economic climate, when jobs are more difficult to secure and meeting basic needs is a pressing challenge for a sizeable proportion of our population.

I strongly support including members of the public on the Task Force. Fostering inclusion of both advocates and recipients of safety net services will help to convey that the Task Force and state government recognizes the value of such participation. Moreover, the Task Force will be better able to accomplish its goals by drawing upon the considerable expertise and insights from representative members from the public.

The proposed Task Force's mandate to develop proposals for improving access to basic safety net services and improving family welfare programs is a necessary step for the State. I urge members of the Health Services Committee to support **H.B. 6218 – An Act Establishing a Task Force on Safety Net Services**. Doing so is in the interests of not only those children and families who benefit directly from the State's social safety net, but also benefits everyone residing in the State. Thank you for your time and attention to this bill.

¹ Elizabeth Lower-Basch, "Testimony for the Record," Hearing on TANF's Role in Providing Assistance to Struggling Families, Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives, March 11, 2010.

² See Appendix B of *Increasing Opportunity: Improving the Jobs First Employment Services Program*, prepared by the Connecticut Alliance for Basic Human Needs (CABHN) and the Welfare Working Group of Connecticut, January 11, 2011.